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At Caracas and Geneva, India bowed to the will of other wide-margin states and dropped its key LOS stance -- that coastal-state seabeds should be cut off at 200 miles to forestall leaving "virtually nothing" for the international community. It now favors extending national seabeds to the outer edge of the continental margin but insists that revenues from mineral resources beyond 200 miles should be shared with underdeveloped states through the proposed international authority.

Seabeds are increasingly important to India as the world energy crisis, plus New Delhi's goal of oil self-sufficiency by the 1980s, spur the search for oil resources offshore and on. Its sole producing offshore field, Bombay High in the Gulf of Cambay, may yield at least 1 million metric tons this (its second) year and 10 times as much within 5 years. With foreign assistance others may soon be developed in areas from the Kutch Basin and Saurashtra to Lakshadweep off the west coast, in the Cauvery Basin off the southeast coast, and in the West Bengal-Orissa Basin off the northeast coast. Interest in these and other seabed resources has prompted India to start delimiting its maritime boundaries; agreements have been signed with Indonesia and Sri Lanka but not yet with its other six neighbors. New Delhi is having problems with Dacca, which wants the median line bent slightly westward to compensate for area denied by its curved shoreline. India disagrees, both to avoid setting a bad precedent and also to assure its presence in the area should suspected large oil reserves be found. American firms are independently conducting the search for the two countries.

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At Caracas India also adopted the prevailing view on fisheries; rather than a 100-mile exclusive fishing zone, it now favors a fishing zone coincident with the 200-mile economic zone.

India's other LOS positions are largely the same as before Caracas, but some have been altered by events or were more sharply defined at the Caracas and Geneva sessions.

Before the two meetings India strongly opposed all sea-related nuclear activities. Doubts it voiced about "free" vs. "innocent" passage in straits stemmed from a fear of ship-based nuclear emissions. India still opposes the placement of nuclear and other mass-destruction weapons on the seabed and ocean floor but has changed its view on nuclear vessels since becoming the world's sixth nuclear power in May 1974 and is seriously considering acquiring some for its navy and merchant fleet. With this, it appears India's support for the U.S. view on unimpeded straits transit is now conclusive.

Before Caracas the only archipelago comment from India, which has two archipelagos and about 1,000 islands, was that it opposed any claim that restricted passage through traditional shipping channels. At Caracas, however, India called for a "suitable regime" for archipelagos and islands and urged that "no distinction" be made among archipelagos that: constitute a single state, are an integral part of a coastal state, or are some distance away from a coastal state. India's "Mr. LOS," Dr. S. P. Jagota, particularly stressed that the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago -- which he called an "extension of the Indonesian chain" -- be handled on a par with Indonesia or any other archipelago. After the India-Indonesia delimitation agreement was signed in August 1974, however, India's concern over "unequal treatment" apparently vanished and its spokesmen said nothing about archipelagos at Geneva.

In an international forum and particularly in a "Group of 77" frame of reference, India tends to voice its opinions more forcefully than it does in low-key, factual meetings with U.S. officials. What had seemed fairly bland views on scientific research and marine pollution, for instance, appeared more pointed as India led the push for exclusive coastal-state control in these areas. By and large, however, India's LOS stance continues to be shaped by the same world position it had before Caracas and Geneva: to be neutral vis-a-vis the major powers, to champion the underdog -- in this case landlocked and narrow-margin states -- and to be a major spokesman for underdeveloped nations. India's future LOS role more than likely will blend these international objectives with its own national priorities.